

# what's up?

## What's it all about?

During adolescence, teens grow, change in shape and become capable of producing children. Adults face 2 major issues when looking at adolescent growth and development:

- Understanding adolescents in the context of their own experiences, as well as the expectations of the adult world.
- Helping adolescents know if their growth falls within the parameters of “normal,” or when to seek additional help.

## Why does it matter?

Adolescents are often asking “Am I normal?” They worry: “I don’t look like my friends.” “I’m too tall/short, fat/thin.” Adults who reassure them and give clear, helpful information can support teens through this confusing and challenging time. Knowledgeable adults can help teens learn to cope with the changes in their bodies and avoid problems.

**Note:** It is important to keep in mind that physical and emotional development do not always occur at the same pace. So, although a teen may have the body that looks like an adult, they may still be developing the emotional maturity that goes along with it!

## What are the details?

Stage	Physical Changes in Girls	Physical Changes in Boys
<b>Early (11-14 years)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• body fat increases</li> <li>• breasts begin to enlarge</li> <li>• height and weight increases</li> <li>• first menstrual period</li> <li>• hips widen</li> <li>• skin and hair become more oily, pimples may appear</li> <li>• underarm hair growth</li> <li>• appetite/nutrition changes</li> <li>• pubic hair grows</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• testicles grow larger</li> <li>• underarm and facial hair growth</li> <li>• pubic hair grows</li> <li>• pimples may appear</li> <li>• height and weight increases</li> <li>• muscles develop</li> <li>• voice deepens</li> <li>• appetite/nutrition needs change</li> <li>• breasts can get tender</li> </ul>
<b>Middle (15-17 years)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• usually have reached full physical development</li> <li>• increased concern about physical image, weight</li> <li>• eating habits change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• close to full physical development</li> <li>• voice continues to lower</li> <li>• facial hair appears</li> <li>• continue to gain height/muscle</li> <li>• eating habits change</li> </ul>
<b>Late (18-19 years)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• few physical changes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• few physical changes</li> </ul>

## What can I do?

As an adult in a teen's life, there are many things you can do to help them safely move through the growth and development of adolescence. Here are a few tips:

- Start talking to youth at 9 or 10 years of age about puberty. They should be prepared early for upcoming changes.
- Provide solid, accurate information about the physical changes teens experience.
- Reassure teens that there is a great deal of variation in "normal growth and development."
- Support healthy food choices. Teens need lots of calcium-rich foods for bone growth. Provide healthy alternatives to "junk food."
- If eating habits start jeopardizing health (unreasonable dieting, rapid weight gain or loss), do not hesitate to consult a doctor.
- Encourage regular physical activity. Regular exercise contributes to a teen's health—from walking to school to organized sports. Be a role model by exercising regularly yourself.
- Provide information or encourage teens to learn more about growth and development.
- Be alert for early and late physically maturing adolescents because they may be at increased risk for a number of problems such as depression. If something seems wrong, consult a health care provider. There is no harm in asking questions.
- Take the time to listen. Adults should take teens seriously when they raise concerns about their appearance.
- If a teen does not have health insurance, check eligibility for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). CHIP provides health coverage to children whose families have too much income to qualify for the children's Medicaid program but who don't have, or can't afford, private insurance for their children.

**hot  
links!**

Washington State Department of Health  
DOH Pub 910-124 11/2003  
[www.doh.wa.gov](http://www.doh.wa.gov)

Resources listed here are provided as a public service and do not imply endorsement by the State of Washington.

References for source materials are available from the Child and Adolescent Health program, 360-236-3547.

For persons with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. Please call 1-800-525-0127.

## What's up with puberty?

### What milestones define puberty?

- Reproductive organs mature and secondary sex characteristics develop (pubic hair, facial hair).
- Bones grow rapidly (adolescent growth spurt), then slow before finally stopping.
- The body's shape, including fat distribution, changes.
- Strength and endurance increase.
- The mind and emotions change and mature. The teen develops more "adult" feelings, ideas and values.

### Major outcomes of puberty:

- Adult size, shape and appearance
- Physical distinction between sexes
- Ability to reproduce

### Features of puberty:

- The sequence of changes is similar for all persons.
- There may be a wide variation in the pace at which changes occur (when it starts and how long it takes).
- Physical changes that can be seen in the body and mental/emotional changes (mood swings, changes in values, strong romantic attachments) reflect the normal hormonal changes that go on inside the body and mind of the teen.

**American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry** [www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)

Go to Facts for Families, "Normal Adolescent Development" (Fact Sheets #57 and #58)

**Teaching Teens about Puberty** [www.teachingteens.com/tpubrty.htm](http://www.teachingteens.com/tpubrty.htm)

**Washington State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)** 1-877-KIDS-NOW;  
<http://fortress.wa.gov/dshs/maa/CHIP/>

**Washington State Healthy Youth Survey 2002** [www3.doh.wa.gov/HYS/](http://www3.doh.wa.gov/HYS/)

**Bright Futures** [www.brightfutures.org/TipSheets/index.html](http://www.brightfutures.org/TipSheets/index.html)

Go to Family Tip Sheets, Middle Childhood and Adolescence

**Society for Adolescent Medicine** [www.adolescenthealth.org](http://www.adolescenthealth.org)  
Resource for health care providers, teens and parents

**Kids Health** [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)

Age-appropriate health information for kids, teens and parents

**American Medical Association** [www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/1947.html](http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/1947.html)  
Guidelines for Adolescent Preventive Services (GAPS)



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